

COOPER PEDY

NOVEL VILLAGE ON OPAL FIELDS.

Away in the heart of the Stuart Range, 170 miles in a northerly direction from Kingoonya, on the trans-Australian Railway, and 110 miles due west of William Creek, lies one of the most novel villages in the Commonwealth. Although there are no fewer than four general stores, a police station, and a population at present of from 70 to 80 people, with the exception of a galvanised iron structure that does duty as a lockup, there are no buildings in the ordinary sense of the term. The reason is that the inhabitants reside underground in what are termed "dug-outs," and which are, for the most part, very comfortable, consisting in some cases of two or more rooms. "Cooper Pedy," the name given to this "dugout" village, was chosen because in aboriginal lingo it signifies "white man living in a hole." It was here that opal was first discovered in South Australia, and, so far as is known, is the only opal field in the State. Many thousands of pounds worth of the precious stone have been unearthed during the past four years, and, on the assumption that there are as "good fish in the sea as ever came out," there are fortunes yet awaiting the diligent digger in the reaping of a bumper harvest of opal. Only a comparatively small area has yet been worked, and the opal-bearing country may be traced for a distance of 40 miles.

Chatting on Monday to a recent visitor to the fields, a representative of the Adelaide "Register" recently ascertained that the great drawback to the prosperity of the place is the fact that at the moment there is no market for the stone, some of which in normal times is valued at up to £30 an ounce. The

valued at up to £30 an ounce. The diggers, however, are "hanging on," optimistic, as is usual with the prospector, that soon the market will open up and that they will be on the high road to fortune. Another drawback is the lack of water. During the past year, however, phenomenal rains have fallen, and water was conserved wherever possible. It is some time now since showers occurred, consequently water has to be carted from a waterhole 14 miles distant. This is not expected to last more than a few weeks, when supplies will have to be obtained from a waterhole still further away. So much as £3 for 100 gallons has been paid for this essential to life. With the scarcity of water, one naturally does not see too many shower baths, but a digger has improvised a 2-lb. jam tin so as not to be denied his morning shower. As the water is not allowed to waste, it is drained into a tub and poured back in the jam tin for further use—a sort of perpetual motion shower bath. Recognising that without an adequate supply the development of the field is not only retarded, but stifled, the Government has made several attempts to obtain water by boring which, however, have been abortive. It has now entered upon a scheme for constructing an underground concrete tank, with a capacity of half a million gallons, at a cost of many thousands of pounds. This work is now in progress, and the employment provided for the miners, who in many cases have opal but no cash, is a veritable godsend. "Two policemen are stationed at Cooper Pedy," said the visitor. "There are no licensed premises on the field, and, with such a law-abiding community, one wonders why these guardians of the law are required in this out-of-the-way place, with the nearest neighbour about 100 miles away."

A weekly mail is maintained to and from the opal field, leaving Kingoonya on Fridays, after the ar-

Kalgoorlie on Fridays, after the arrival of the Trans-Australian express from Port Augusta, and arriving at Coober Pedy on the afternoon of Saturday, Friday night being spent at Mount Eba Station. The return journey is begun about 10 o'clock on Tuesday morning. Kingoonya is reached on Wednesday afternoon in time for the mails and passengers to continue the journey eastward by the evening express. The Commonwealth Government has established the money order system, and an agency of the Commonwealth Savings Bank, facilities which are keenly appreciated by

part of the country are most severe. In the summer the heat is almost unbearable, and flies are troublesome. This, coupled with the scarcity of water, and the fact that he is obliged to do his own cooking and washing, makes the lot of the miner far from being enviable. At the same time the life is a free and easy one, good fellowship and comradeship prevail among the miners, and they are content, in spite of disabilities, to dig and delve, in the hope that patch and colour will sooner or later give place to the lustre for which they are so diligent in their search.

the miners. The post office is located in one of the dug-outs, in which a general store is conducted, and is unique in the fact that it is possibly the only one of its kind in the Commonwealth. Some wag has placed a porcelain telegraph insulator on the end of an iron rod near to the entrance to the post office dugout, just to give the place an air of up-to-datedness, but who knows but what wireless will yet come to its own and bring Coober Pedy within telegraphic touch with the outside world? A few weeks ago beef was being conveyed to Coober Pedy from Mount Eba by the mail driver, a distance of more than 100 miles, where it was being retailed at 1/ a lb. As an auxiliary to beef, rabbits, which are plentiful, constitute an article of diet, and in order to keep them in condition, vegetation is dray and scanty—they usually feed on scraps of potato peelings and other dainties that fall from the digger's table. It is an interesting sight to watch the feeding of these rodents, who congregate near to the dugouts at sundown for their evening meal. One digger confessed to maintaining a family of 40 rabbits in this manner.

The climatic conditions in this part of the country are most severe.